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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES MAY MISS THE BOAT

REF KHARTOUM 1167

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Two Darfurian civil society groups are separately working to combine existing civil society proposals with the hope of developing a unified, comprehensive view of Darfurians on how to resolve the crisis in their region, although neither anticipates its work will be complete before the launching of the Sudan People's Initiative on October 16. Polchief urged both groups to unify their efforts and put forth a proposal as soon as possible to contribute to discussions organized by the regime and the Qatari Government. The Sudan People's Initiative, meanwhile, is apparently set to kick off with a weeklong conference in Khartoum. Following these deliberations, the NCP hopes to begin negotiations with the rebels in Qatar by the end of the month. End Summary.

OVERLAPPING CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

¶2. (SBU) On October 5 poloffs met with representatives of the "Unification of Darfur People's Vision" working group, a civil society organization dedicated to developing a unified proposal to resolve the crisis in Darfur. Though its core members are civil society leaders and intellectuals who have participated in the various international conferences on Darfur (Reftel), the group has attempted to broaden its reach and claims to have sought input from all aspects of Darfurian society. To that end, it has assembled a roster of 192 individuals, democratically chosen from fourteen designated constituencies such as women, IDPs, refugees, native administration, nomads, farmers, lawyers, media, and others. All tribal groups are represented, said Siddig Ismail, one of the group's leaders. The group hopes to convene a conference of all chosen representatives in London in mid-November to unify and finalize its proposal, he said. Its main objective is "to pressure the government and the rebels to get to the negotiating table," he said. "We want the voice of civil society to be heard." As a conflation of views on Darfur, the group's final communiqu will address the familiar themes of land rights, resettlement and rehabilitation, compensation, and the like. Siddig stated that an overarching theme of the group's work is a return to Darfur's historical right to be one state, and a Vice Presidential slot for Darfur. "These are non-negotiable," he said.

¶3. (SBU) On October 7 poloffs met with Professor Atayeb Hajj Attia, Director of Peace Research Center of the University of Khartoum and Professor Abdul Rahman B. Dossa, Secretary General of a "White Paper" group seeking to collect and unify all civil society proposals and resolutions presented in the various workshops and conferences, particularly those held in Heidelberg, Concordis, Jeddah, Dar Es Salaam (Reftel) and discussions of Khartoum-based Darfuri intellectuals. They are seeking to present a comprehensive "white paper" to represent the views of Darfur civil society to inform future negotiations between the GOS and rebel factions. "This will be a practicable and workable document that puts forth all

existing ideas and recommendations," said Professor Attia, noting that while there is near-total agreement on many issues, others are more contentious. Professor Dossa added that the group "is non-political... We are just trying to do something useful to solve the problem." They envision presenting a draft of the white paper to a mini-conference of 70-80 select individuals to sharpen their focus, and publish a final version for universal distribution. Though short on time and resources, the group expects to have a preliminary draft ready in 17-20 days (Note: A former Embassy Political Assistant is one of the key drafters. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) Given the apparent similarity in the two civil groups' goals and objectives and many cross-relationships and linkages between them, polchief urged that they unify their efforts and put forth a joint proposal as soon as possible. With the Sudan People's initiative apparently scheduled to be launched on October 16, polchief told them that the window of opportunity to influence people and events may not remain open for the several months that each organization thinks necessary to complete its respective study. He also encouraged them to seek media exposure and widespread publication of the final communiqu  to make sure their voices are heard.

PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE TO LAUNCH OCTOBER 16

¶5. (SBU) On October 7, polchief met with Atta Al Mannan, an NCP member and former governor of South Darfur who is involved with the much-hyped Sudan People's Initiative. Al Mannan stated the initiative is set to be launched on October 16 with a weeklong conference. It is envisioned that negotiations hosted by Qatar would commence towards the end of the month, he said, noting that

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all parties have been invited to participate. He was optimistic that representatives from JEM would fly to Doha, noting that Khalil Ibrahim has authorized his brother, Dr. Gibriel Ibrahim, to conduct negotiations on his behalf. However Al Mannan asked polchief to "help us convince Abdul Wahid." The DPA will remain the basis and the starting point for all political negotiations on Darfur, he said.

¶6. (SBU) Al Mannan stated that the NCP is committed to fostering dialogue and welcomes universal participation in the Sudan People's Initiative. "It's a very comprehensive effort" he said. "All proposals will be on the table." He noted that the time was ripe for finding a solution, as "people are very flexible...even the government." He expressed hope that by the end of the Sudan People's Initiative conference a consensus would be found. Polchief agreed that a framework for resolution would be a positive development, but urged that a serious offer be made to Abdel Wahid and Khalil Ibrahim in advance of the conference. Al Mannan urged that the USG strongly encourage the rebel groups to participate. He also asked that the USG urge Libya and Chad to play a constructive role in resolving the conflict, particularly the latter. "There will be no sustainable Darfur solution without Chad," he said, noting Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie, Mutriff Siddiq and Salah Ghosh had all brought up this point in their meetings with French officials in Paris.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Though chided by some as elitist, the work of civil society groups represents some of the most substantive thinking on how to resolve the Darfur crisis to date. If they are successful in drawing input from a wider representation of Darfurians, these groups can play a constructive role in providing a voice for the people of Darfur (especially alienated IDPs) in future negotiations. This is a role that rebel factions are unsuited to play. It is unfortunate therefore that neither group appears ready to present a unified proposal before October 16. That said, we do not expect any dramatic progress on the Sudan People's Initiative - other than perhaps an opening ceremony - before the end of the month.

ASQUINO